
GEORGE BERKELEY (1685-1753)

Introduction and overview of his project

BIOGRAPHY: Education and Career

- (b) 1685 Co. Kilkenny Ireland; (d) 1753
 - Studies and teaches at Trinity College, Dublin
 - Travels Europe as court intellectual with the Earl of Peterborough (losing *Principles* Part II in Italy?)
 - Big hit on the London literary scene (mainly b/c of the popular *Dialogues*); friend of literary celebrities Jonathan Swift & Alexander Pope
 - Later Dean of Derry and Bishop of Cloyne (near Cork)
 - Attempts to set up a college in Bermuda & then Rhode Island (but the funding falls through)
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BIOGRAPHY:

Intellectual developments and publications

- Serious mathematician; attacks the conceptual foundations of Newton's infinitesimal calculus
 - Scientific work in optics and the mechanics of vision
 - Conservative political philosopher; last great champion of the doctrine of 'passive obedience'.
 - Major philosophical works:
 - *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge Part I* (1710)
 - *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713)
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BERKELEY'S PHILOSOPHICAL AGENDA:

- Contrary to Locke, we can achieve a comprehensive metaphysical understanding of the universe
 - To defend common sense against the counterintuitive theories of philosophers
 - To defeat skepticism and atheism
 - To defeat 'materialism'
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BERKELEY'S IMMATERIALISM (or IDEALISM)

- **Berkeley rejects the view that there exists a mind-independent material world.** He thinks that this mind-independent material world is a philosopher's fiction.
 - We have no good reason to think that it exists, and in fact we can prove that it cannot exist, and even that we cannot even intelligibly talk of such a world. Really the whole hypothesis is just verbiage, unintelligible gobbledygook.
 - **All that exists in the world are spirits (or minds) and their ideas,** where these ideas are really just states of those spirits.
 - According to Berkeley, there *is* a 'real world', but it consists simply of the ideas that we receive non-voluntarily from God (i.e. perceive), rather than those we dream up ourselves. The real world is not up to us and it is independent of us. It is caused by and depends on God.
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